

**Process Paper for  
Request for Reconsideration Project**

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*“Free speech is the whole thing, the whole ball game. Free speech is life itself.” - Salman Rushdie*

Given my personal inclination toward being a strong proponent of First Amendment rights and the ALA's interpretations of Intellectual Freedom, while considering how to approach this project I thought it would be a valuable and challenging experience to choose the position of recommending the removal of a book from a library's collection. In considering which book to focus on, I was drawn to *Revolutionary Voices* because (1) I am a supporter and advocate for people who identify as LGBTQ; and (2) I had completed a paper last semester that compared two other non-fiction books geared toward LGBTQ teens, so the subject matter and the importance of such books to young people is fresh in my mind.

Having completed many SLIS courses, I am very comfortable using the IUPUI library's electronic databases, so I did not find it difficult to locate reviews for *Revolutionary Voices* in professional journals. Regarding the news article, it was a little difficult wading through the articles specifically pertaining to the Burlington County Library System's case versus the concurrent challenge at nearby Rancocas Valley High School. The reason for this has partly to do with the BCLS's efforts to keep the challenge out of the media because of the media attention given to RVHS.

BCLS's collection development policy and request for reconsideration form were tricky to locate, as well. I navigated the library's website, consulted the site index, and conducted numerous Advanced Google Searches to no avail. It was a reference to the

New Jersey ACLU's records request on the LibraryLaw Blog that yielded the documents I was looking for. This same resource provided numerous emails between the library's Director, Gail Sweet and numerous other individuals. I spent a lot of time piecing together the chain of events provided by these emails (for instance, refer to Appendix I and II below).

Since I had to imagine myself as a staff member of the affected library, I began to realize that the events that actually occurred were complicated by the fact that the library chose to not follow its own policy for handling challenges. Particularly interesting was the link between a conservative group known as Glenn Beck's 9.12 Project and the challenger at BCLS and RVHS, Beverly Marinelli, who has ties with this group. In fact, I found references to the BCLS Commissioner that Marinelli first spoke to about wanting to challenge *Revolutionary Voices* at the public library (Library Commissioner Pat Delany) as having possible ties to the same group. Beck's 9.12 group is essentially a nationwide right-winged government watchdog network, and at the time of these challenges, Beck had openly called for his members to lobby against libraries with certain book titles, including *Revolutionary Voices*, dealing with teenage sexuality and issues of homosexuality (see for instance, Belonsky, Burns, Hoft, and Osborne). I feel like the whole situation with BCLS got out of hand for fear of media coverage, and possibly for other more sinister reasons if the 9.12 connection of Commissioner Delany is accurate.

In building my case for recommending *Revolutionary Voices* be removed from the library, I heavily weighed the ethical responsibilities set forth in the ALA's Library Bill of Rights and ALA's related interpretive documents. I researched the laws and court

cases relevant to the issues of obscenity, child pornography, “harmful to minors” doctrines. I wanted to tie my argument directly to the library's own mission and policies, which seem to be informed to a large degree by the ALA's position on intellectual freedom. I tried to base my argument on the information that would have been available in April/May of 2010 since that is when the BCLS would have made its formal decision based upon a committee of staff members' recommendations (had BCLS followed its own procedures). Admittedly, there are a few articles I cited in my Recommendation that were published after May 2010, but I did the best I could. Lastly, I chose to address my letter to Director Sweet rather than the library's commissioners since BCLS's policy indicates that to do so is the procedure for handling challenges. The device of addressing the Director rather than a library board hopefully justifies the length, breadth, and depth of my argument.

I struggled to find a way to argue for the book's removal in a way that would be true to how I might have approached this situation in real life. When I came across the PROTECT Act of 2003's provisions for “virtual child pornography” I decided that, while it would make for a longer, more complex argument, it was the only argument that I felt comfortable with since I personally believe the book is absolutely appropriate for a young adult audience. The only possible way I could argue in favor of removing the book was if it contained child pornography, and the Daryl Vocat etching was the closest thing I could find to justify such an argument. I feel like it was a far stretch to argue that Vocat's etching would actually be found by a jury to be “virtual child pornography”, but this was the closest I could come.

Lastly, regarding the approach of working with a partner who I don't know

personally for a project in an online class, I've had at least 3 other similar group projects in the past. I always find it a bit tricky to balance the different work-styles of group members (some might wait until the last minute, while others like to get things done ahead of time, for instance). With my work schedule and the accelerated pace of this course, I wanted to get started right away and was a bit concerned that my early initiations by email and request to schedule times to chat online might be perceived as being a bit pushy. Hopefully this was not the case. Overall, I think that communicating by several emails and a chat session seemed to be sufficient. I'm really interested to see what my partner, Carri Genovese, has written for her recommendation letter.

## Appendix

### I.

#### **MEMO RE: Beverly Marinelli's Fictitious Burlington County Library System (BCLS) Request for Reconsideration Form for her 2010 Challenge of Revolutionary Voices, Edited by Amy Sonnie**

In the April 2010 incident involving the BCLS's inclusion of multiple copies of book *Revolutionary Voices*, edited by Amy Sonnie, in its collection (perhaps in the Young Adult section, however, I have no way of confirming this), which was challenged by Beverly Marinelli, the BCLS did not follow its own procedures for handling such challenges.

Specifically, after complaining verbally to Patrick Delany, a Library Commissioner with BCLS, presumably sometime before March 16, 2010, Delany related the conversation to BCLS's Director, Gail Sweet, who on March 16th emailed Marinelli with enclosures of the library's procedures for challenges and BCLS's Request for Reconsideration Form. The information that Marinelli was provided included:

**Any patron may request that the library review a decision to select or withdraw an item. Those who wish reconsideration of such a decision should complete the Request for Reconsideration Form (Appendix E). A committee of staff selectors as designated by the Library Director will review the material in question. Committee members will make their recommendations to the Director who will make the final decision concerning the material. The Director will notify the person requesting the reconsideration of the decision. If that person is not satisfied with the action taken, an appeal may be made to the Library Commission.**

Ultimately, Marinelli never completed the Request for Reconsideration form, however, various sources regarding this case as well as Marinelli's contemporaneous challenge for the same book (along with two others) at the Rancocas Valley High

School in Mt. Holly New Jersey provide a good deal of information that can be used to piece together the events that actually occurred in contrast to the library's policy on challenges.

We know that a "committee of staff selectors" was formed by Director Sweet as directed by the policy, however, this committee was comprised of herself and BCLS's Assistant Director, Reference & Adult Services, Margaret Delaney. The committee's recommendation relating to Marinelli's informal challenge was submitted to the Library Commission on April 27, 2010. By an email of that same date, Sweet advises Marinelli that:

**The Library Commissioners supported our staff recommendation to remove 'Revolutionary Voices' from our shelves. As the copies that are checked out return, we will take them out of circulation.**

**We appreciate your interest in the library.**

An April 28, 2010 handwritten note by Director Sweet indicates that she informed Marinelli that "Jeanne [one of the Library Commissioners] recused herself." Two emails from Director Sweet to a staff member at another BCLS branch who inquires about the rumors within the system about the challenge (dated May 24<sup>th</sup> and May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010) reveal that "we" were aware of Marinelli's challenges at Rancocas Valley High "and took a look at the book. It was recommended by [Margaret Delaney] and me that the book be removed. The commissioners supported our decision. There was no official challenge, no actual vote by the commissioners. We made the decision before the Board of Ed decided the book at RV" and the reason Sweet gave the inquiring staff member for the decision was "Child pornography."

A May 12, 2010 email from Director Sweet to an unidentified person called "Mandy" responds to Mandy's email to Sweet about having gotten calls from the inquirer for "information on the library." Mandy did not answer the calls and had emailed Sweet about whether there is something she (Mandy) should be aware of. Sweet tells Mandy that it was about the book, *Revolutionary Voices* and that:

**...[Library Commissioner Patrick Delany] and I both talked to the reporter. What I said is that the commissioners supported the staff recommendation that the book be removed from our shelves. Normally we would not have involved the commissioners but in this case we did because we thought there might be some press interest based on the Board of Ed decision to remove the book from Rancocas Valley High School. I told him that we made the decision prior to the Board of Ed decision and that we do not like to remove books. It was felt, however, that the book was not appropriate.**

Given BCLS's decision to handle the challenge informally rather than follow its own established policy and review procedure, and given that this assignment requires that we submit letters of recommendation (one in favor of Marinelli's challenge and one against) to the library, we have decided to use the information available to imagine a situation where BCLS did follow its own policies and Marinelli did file a formal complaint through the library's Request for Reconsideration Form.

This fictitious form is below, along with the sources consulted in order to compose the answers we believe we can reasonably imagine Marinelli might have provided.

#### **Sources Consulted:**

##### **I. In Preparing the MEMO RE: Beverly Marinelli's Fictitious Burlington County**



**Library System (BCLS) Request for Reconsideration Form for her 2010 Challenge  
of Revolutionary Voices, Edited by Amy Sonnie**

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**II. In Drafting Beverly Marinelli's Fictional Burlington County Library System  
Request for Reconsideration Form for her 2010 Challenge of *Revolutionary  
Voices*,**

**Edited by Amy Sonnie**

**A. B. Marinelli's Contact Information:**

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Kinney, Monica Yant. "Working to Shelve Students' Book Choices." *Philadelphia Inquirer (Online)* 2 May 2010, Web. 22 May 2011. Quoted in full at

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Osborne, James. "Burlco School Board Bans Book on Homosexuality." *Philadelphia*

*Inquirer (Online)* 10 May 2010, Web. 22 May 2011. Cached at

<[http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:mxBWVjJfd0AJ:articles.philly.com/2010-05-05/news/24958597\\_1\\_school-board-education-fund-books+philly.com+marinelli+revolutionary+voices&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a&source=www.google.com](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:mxBWVjJfd0AJ:articles.philly.com/2010-05-05/news/24958597_1_school-board-education-fund-books+philly.com+marinelli+revolutionary+voices&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a&source=www.google.com)>

Rayfield, Jillian. "NJ Library Removes LGBT Book After Complaint From Member Of Glenn Beck's 9/12 Movement." *TPMMuckraker (Online)*. 4 Aug. 2010. Web. 21 May 2011.

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Subject: Gay teenagers. *Burlington County Library System (Online)*. Web. 21

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[session=13D6F067T4232.1522&profile=hq&uindex=SW&term=Gay](http://hip.bcls.lib.nj.us/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=13D6F067T4232.1522&profile=hq&uindex=SW&term=Gay%20teenagers.&aspect=basic_search&menu=search&source=~!horizon)

[%20teenagers.&aspect=basic\\_search&menu=search&source=~!horizon](http://hip.bcls.lib.nj.us/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=13D6F067T4232.1522&profile=hq&uindex=SW&term=Gay%20teenagers.&aspect=basic_search&menu=search&source=~!horizon)>

## Appendix II

**BURLINGTON COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM**  
**HEADQUARTERS LOCATION 5 PIONEER BOULEVARD**  
**MT. HOLLY, NJ 08060**

**REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF LIBRARY MATERIALS**

Title Revolutionary Voices ☒ Book ☐ Periodical ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Author Amy Sonnie (Editor)

Publisher Alyson Books (Los Angeles, CA)

Request initiated by Beverly Marinelli

Address 28 Flemish

City Lumberton State NJ Zip 08048 Telephone (609) 261-3346

**DO YOU REPRESENT:**  
☒ Yourself  
☐ An Organization (Name) \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Other Group (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

1. To what in the work do you object? (Please be specific. Cite pages. Use other sheet.)  
The book is pervasively vulgar, obscene, and inappropriate, especially page 103 which is a particularly explicit illustration of two Boy Scouts watching two men have sex (Child Pornography)

2. Did you read the entire work? Some \_\_\_\_\_ What parts? I also read about the book on RightNetwork.com (http://bit.ly/hDDfo8).

3. What do you feel might be the result of reading this work? I am not a homophobe but the book promotes the sexualization of children regardless of the sexual orientation.

4. For what age group would you recommend this work? Adults 18 or older

5. What do you believe is the theme of this work? The book promotes the sexualization of children

6. What are the reviews of literary critics concerning this work? The book has been promoted by GLSEN

7. What would you like your library to do about this work?  
☐ Do not lend it to my child  
☐ Return it to the staff selection committee for reevaluation  
☒ Other, Explain This book should not be read by children. Either remove it from the library or prevent children from reading it some other way

8. In its place, what work(s) would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of the subject treated?  
The library has other books in the collection for teenagers who are homosexual  
(Link to library's catalog: http://bit.ly/iR2xYB)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date 4/11/2010

4/00rdc

**APPENDIX E**  
**NOTE/DISCLAIMER:**  
**THIS**  
**FORM IS A**  
**FICTIONAL**  
**REPRESENTATION.**

**Beverly Marinelli**  
**did not complete**  
**this form.**

**This form was**  
**created**  
**by**  
**Lisa Wynn by consulting**  
**resources**  
**as a fictional**  
**supplement**  
**to a paper/project**  
**for a**  
**Library**  
**Science Course**  
**on**  
**Intellectual Freedom.**

**30 May 2011**  
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